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Enjoys Baseball



BASEBALL IS ONE FACET of American Life that's not new to Kenneth H. Rowe, former North Korean pilot now teaching engineering at the University of North Dakota. Rowe, who in 1953 defected to the West taking his MIG-15 jet plane with him, says his father played baseball with him when he was a boy. He picks the Los Angeles Dodgers as his favorite team. (Herald Photo).

Defected To West:

UND Instructor Once Red Flier

By MIKE CARRIGAN
Herald Staff Writer

In the summer of 1953, shortly before the Korean War's end, Noh H. Suk, a fighter pilot in the Communist North Korean Air Force, was sent aloft over Communist-held Manchuria to pursue a new and mysterious U.S. aircraft.

On each of 10 such missions, his Soviet-built MIG-15 jet fighter was outmaneuvered by the high altitude American planes.

After he was thrust into wordy silence that September as the "Red" flier to defect to the

West with his then top-secret jet plane intact, the U.S. mystery flights lost importance in the life of Noh Keum Suk.

Teaches Engineering

Now 28, the former Red captain is teaching mechanical engineering at the University of North Dakota here last fall, using the name Kenneth H. Rowe. Since settling here he has jealously guarded his private life and accepted no speaking engagements before a local service club he avoided discussing his life before the Iron Curtain.

The crossing of the border into territory in early May was the soundest collapse of the Soviet domination that followed. Rowe added a new dimension to the year-old mystery flights.

Rowe said here last week that he's now convinced that the planes which so easily eluded him over Manchurian skies in 1953 were forerunners of Powers' X-45 plane.

Praises U.S. Pilots

"The pilots of these American planes were very good," he reported, "and had perhaps 10 times the flying experience I did. The planes must have carried superior radar, jamming devices and other equipment to evade capture."

The former pilot, who once aspired to be a poet, admits he never actually sighted any of the early spy planes. But he insists the Communists knew the kinds of aircraft to expect over their territory because of tips from Red agents.

He said Communist spies trained to report flights northward from U.S. bases were stationed at most air strips in South Korea.

Saw Spy Photos

Rowe offered as proof of the effectiveness of this spy network the fact that as a fledgling pilot at the North Korean Air Force Academy in 1950, he was shown close-up photographs, taken from many angles, of all U.S. planes then in use.

He stressed that he didn't think the planes he was ordered to shoot down were the same as that used by Powers, "because such planes are certain to constantly improve over the years."

The spy planes seemed capable of about the same, or perhaps a little better performance, than the MIG-15 -- which by his estimate were then able to fly at 16,000 feet and at speeds of one and a half times the speed of sound.

\$100,000 Reward Offered

The best fighter the Americans could put into the air at this time was the F-86, he claimed, which when fully armed could not fight above 14,000 feet. The great difference in fighting capability between the two jet fighters was the reason Gen. Mark Clark, then commander of U.N. Forces in the

ward that Rowe collected for turning over the first MIG-15 jet.

The 1953 graduate of Columbia University has steadfastly denied that the \$100,000 reward had anything to do with his defecting to the west.

"I loved America and wanted to get away to join the free world," he claimed when interviewed in the living room of the modest two-story farm home where he lives with his 55-year-old mother.

Rowe, who doesn't define democracy along strictly geographic lines, applauded the twin collapses of the Rhee regime in Korea and the Mendez administration in Turkey and said both men "only paid the penalty for suppressing the freedom of people in their countries."

He maintains he planned to flee Communism long before entering the North Korean Air Force Academy in 1950. He also says he never shot down an American plane and brought along his flight log to prove it.

He did admit engaging in "mock" combat with U.S. planes on his nearly 46 combat missions, but insists he never hit any.

Nearly Lost Life

On five occasions this kind of airborne "Russian roulette," nearly cost him his life. On one of the five times he was tailed by American fighters he said he could see bullets piercing the air over his cockpit.

U.S. agents, after his defection, never suspected him as a spy, he explained, "because the Communists have better methods of placing their agents than by being accompanied by a top-secret weapon."

Asked if it would not be a simple matter to trace the flight log he returned with him, Rowe replied that American intelligence agents are competent to judge whether documents had been altered.

Flaw 60 Missions

His poor record of "kills" led to no doubts of his loyalty to Communism, among his superiors, he claimed, because "just surviving more than 60 combat missions was considered heroic."

He also denied vehemently, as he had previously, that he ever saw leaflets offering the \$100,000 reward ordered dropped over North Korea.